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Politics

ELECTION DAY IN MASS.

Heavy Mass. voter turnout rivals record pace of 2008

By **Peter Schworm** | GLOBE STAFF NOVEMBER 06, 2012

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After a long, intense political season featuring a sharply contested presidential race and a Senate contest with national implications, voters across Greater Boston braved long lines and cold temperatures to make their voices heard, a strong turnout that appeared to rival the record-breaking 2008 election.

Voters lined up well before the polls opened, showed up in force throughout the day, and were still waiting long after polls were scheduled to close.

The heavy turnout, combined with a lengthy slate of ballot questions, caused substantial delays in many locations. Across Boston, some voters faced two-hour waits. Voting in Wrentham, Senator Scott Brown said he had never seen the polls so crowded. Some towns expected turnout to surpass 80 percent.

“It’s the biggest I’ve ever seen,” Peter Koutoujian, the sheriff in Middlesex County, said of voter turnout after visiting a dozen polling places in the area. “It’s overwhelming.”

In Davis Square in Somerville, where a line of voters wrapped around the block in near-freezing temperatures, neighbors handed out coffee and doughnut holes to those waiting in line. In Melrose, parents voted with baby strollers at their feet, and in Waltham, elderly couples helped each other up the stairs to the polls. At a Dorchester middle school, a 106-year-old woman cast her vote with a broad smile.

“God bless her,” said another woman, looking on.

With President Obama a sure bet to carry the Democrat-dominated state, the hard-fought Senate race was on the minds of many voters. Congressional races, as well as ballot questions involving medical marijuana and assisted suicide, also spurred interest.

“It’s been wonderful,” said Georgie Hallock, an election warden in Waltham, where voters began lining up at 6:30 a.m.

There was no official tally of statewide turnout Tuesday, but election officials said voting was brisk and could match or exceed the record tally from the historic 2008 election, when 3.1 million votes were cast.

In Boston, turnout was running ahead of the pace in 2008, with nearly 64 percent of registered voters casting ballots.

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As the polls closed, long lines remained in some polling stations, including Dorchester and South Boston, where at least one precinct had hundreds of people still waiting to vote at 8 p.m.

In the suburbs, election officials reported that voters were making a strong showing. And outside the polls, voters said that after the drawn-out campaigns, they were grateful it was finally their turn.

Gilda Diorio, 67, of Waltham, was pleased to support Republicans. It was “time for a change as far as the presidency goes,” she said. For the Senate, she likes how Brown has “worked across the aisle.”

Terry Goodridge, on the other hand, went with the Democrats. By her reckoning, Obama had “accomplished a lot,” she said. As for Romney, the state’s former governor, “we’ve had our fill of him.”

Yet many voters split their tickets. In Melrose, a number of Obama supporters said they voted for Brown, and in Boston, Sarah Godfrey, 33, said she would vote for Romney and Elizabeth Warren, the Democrat running for Senate.

“I’m just not happy with the situation right now, and if things aren’t going well it doesn’t make sense to vote for the incumbent,” said Godfrey, who voted for Obama four years ago. “I’m not saying it’s necessarily Obama’s fault, but maybe we can give somebody else a shot this time.”

She felt Warren shared her values, she said, while standing in a line that stretched from inside the public library onto the sidewalk.

In Roxbury, Maria Julia Barros, 62, also voted for Obama, who was expected to carry the state by a wide margin.

“He tries to make things better,” she said. “I’m positive he will create more jobs, but it takes time.”

In Somerville, about 100 voters waited outside the Dante Club in the morning chill. Inside, the line kept going, winding its way through the building. Outdoors was just the “preline,” one voter remarked.

Those who arrived at 8:30 a.m. waited nearly two hours but people still stayed upbeat.

“The lines were long, but it’s all worth it,” said Alex Coon, 37. “As long as everybody keeps moving, your hope is sort of kept alive.”

John Alan Roderick, an election warden in Somerville, said the campaigns were getting out the vote, and predicted 90 percent turnout. With such a rush of people, he was relying on people to stay civil.

“We do the best we can, and obviously we’re relying on people’s basic goodness,” he said.

Bill Chisholm, 48, waited for nearly two hours to vote for Elizabeth Warren.

Then, a much longer wait began.

“I’m excited to see results,” he said.

Matt Carroll, Maria Sacchetti, and Eric Moskowitz of the Globe staff and Globe correspondents Patrick D. Rosso, Johanna Kaiser, Jessica Bartlett, Matt Rocheleau, and Melissa M. Werthmann contributed to this report. Peter Schworm can be reached at schworm@globe.com.

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